

Railing Business Soars Skyward

Once a company that had to outsource the powder coating part of its process, this architectural rail making trio near Chicago now is able to provide powder coating services.

BY BRUCE BRYAN

Craig Meyer started in the metalworking business in 1999 making railings for trade show booths.

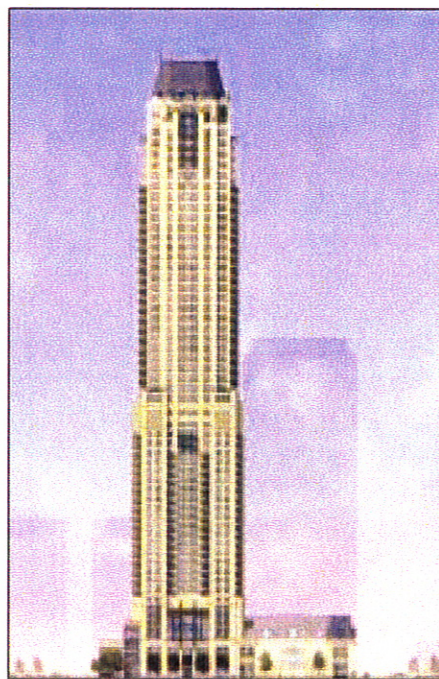
Today, architects are using his products to adorn the 66-story landmark Elysian Hotel on Chicago's Gold Coast. Part of Craig's business success was his decision to learn the powder coating business.

"We used to outsource our powder coating," says Meyer, a partner in Meyer Metals based in suburban Elgin, Ill. Bringing the finishing operation in-house has brought with it a lot of benefits, including control, quality, scheduling flexibility and better profits, according to Meyer.

"The railing is often one of the last things to go on a building" says Ken Tardio, one of Meyer's business partners. "Builders don't want to be caught in a position where they can't close on a million dollar home because the railing isn't painted. That means we have to deliver right on time," he says.

So a year ago, Meyer and Tardio

decided to take matters into their own hands and install a state-of-the-art powder coating system. They moved their welding and assembly operation



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from a nearby shop to a larger facility just up the road and brought in long-time business associate Mark Camacho, who had plenty of previous custom powder coating experience with a firm that had painted some of Meyer's products over the years.

Meyer Metals commissioned Midwest Finishing to design and build a brand new system and turned to Wagner Industrial Systems to supply their powder equipment.

"Our parts are complex shapes," says Tardio. "Like beefy wire goods, they are complicated assemblies made of extrusions and metal stock welded together with lots of corners and edges to contend with." All those tight corners and exposed edges make uniform coverage a nightmare of a challenge, he says. "Because these railings have to survive outdoors in harsh weather conditions all year long, if they aren't painted right, they oxidize or rust very quickly."

Camacho says, "When Wagner came in and showed us their Bravo handgun system, we knew right away that it could

Architectural



Parts enter the three-stage pretreatment system at Meyer Metals. Meyer left room to add additional stages for other processes in the future.

help provide the kind of flexibility and control we need for these unique parts. We spray a wide range of powder and the C4-R remote handgun and Bravo controller are great tools for painters that need to switch frequently between different gun setups.”

The handgun system allows Meyer to pre-program recipes that have been tweaked to deliver the optimum coverage based on gun setup such as airflow and electrostatics. “If I switch from a standard color to a metallic powder I can press a

button and the gun is setup to lay down metallics that look perfect,” says Antonio Nava, a painter who has worked with Camacho in the past and was recruited to Meyer Metals. The remote gun has simple-to-operate push buttons that let Nava make changes to the program without having to leave the spray zone to make many adjustments.

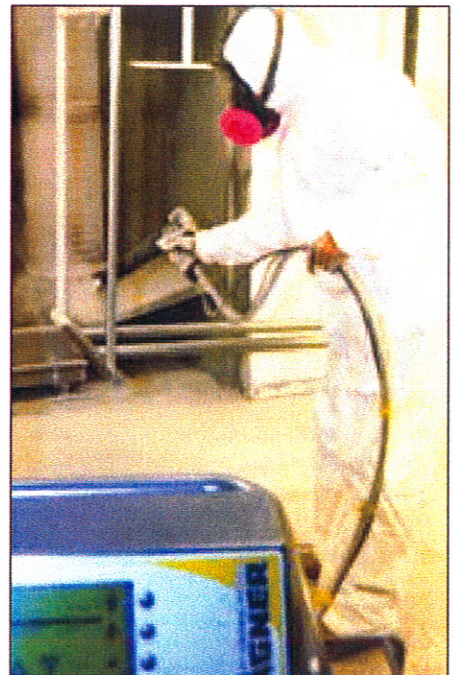
In addition to the right spray equipment, Meyer needed to install a large flexible booth to accommodate two painters. The solution was to install a

dual-zone Wagner PrimaCell booth that consists of two adjoining cross-draft spray areas facing opposite directions so that the two operators can get everywhere on any assembly that passes from one zone to the other.

“The layout lets us maneuver everywhere we need to paint the parts,” says Nava. “The airflow keeps the booth clean and does a good job containing the powder, but near the part the airflow is just right to get nice control over the spray pattern as we paint.”

“The amazing thing about the booth” says Camacho, “is how compact the layout is for the amount of useable space. The dual-zone is designed to be placed directly onto a plant floor with large cartridge collectors in each well-lit spray zone.”

In the past, the way to ensure adequate paint coverage in the hard-to-reach



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The flexibility of the new coating system is suitable for a job shop environment. Meyer says, "We oversized the line knowing we could fill it up with other work. We needed a good line, so going a little bigger and more capable wasn't a big leap, and it allows us to leverage our investment."

spots on the railings meant applying too much powder everywhere else. "Our film thickness on outsourced product used to be all over the board. It wasn't a problem for our customers because we always had the right minimum build, but it was a costly way to meet the spec," says Meyer.

"The new system has saved us 60 to 70 percent of the applied powder through the combination of better air-flow and improvements in transfer efficiency," Camacho says.

The powder line at Meyer Metals includes a three-stage pretreatment system with room to add additional stages for other processes in the future. "We envision adding descaling and other processes in the future as we expand into new markets and start using products such as super-durable powders," Meyer says.

But growing markets for their own products isn't the only reason for

installing the new system.

"We needed to invest in good people to make our product better," reflects Meyer, "but that capability gives us a sales tool to bring in other powder coating business."

And that is just what Meyer Metals is doing: custom coating for others. The flexibility of the new coating system is suitable for this type of job shop environment.

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"It's a win-win-win all the way around," says Meyer. Tardio adds, "We have improved the quality of the paint finish on our own product which is great for our customers. They are unique, smaller builders that build to

suit. We aren't competing with the high volume, simple, 'cookie cutter' producers."

"We are more of a 'boutique' supplier of high quality architectural goods," says Meyer. "But we've also lowered our production cost while decreasing lead times and that's good for us. The custom coating capability is the icing on the cake because it adds a new market for us to apply our powder expertise and it is a good service to other local manufacturers."

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